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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515
January 27, 2011

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President Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

The rise in homegrown terrorism over the past two years has become a major public safety and national security issue.¹ It is a serious problem and is not going away. The government must address this critical issue head on by creating and beginning to implement a counter-radicalization strategy.

Countries in Europe and throughout the world have focused on countering radicalization for some time. They have been steadily adopting the idea that counter-radicalization is more than just “countering violent extremism,” and are increasingly embracing the notion that radicalization itself should be tackled.

Great Britain is a good example. Under Gordon Brown’s Labour government, the Home Office clearly stated that “[o]ur strategy to prevent people becoming terrorists is not simply about tackling violent extremism,” but “[i]t is also about tackling those who espouse extremist views that are inconsistent with our shared values.”² Though a new political party is in power, this idea has continued to gain strength. Most recently, Tory Prime Minister David Cameron said: “I am becoming increasingly convinced it is not enough just to target violent extremism -- we have to target extremism itself. We have to drain the water from the swamp in which the violent extremism grows.”³

Clearly, they see radicalization as a root problem. While radicalization—the process of acquiring and holding extremist beliefs—is not necessarily illegal, it is critical to the phenomenon of terrorism. Without it, terrorist plots do not occur. Recognizing this, many countries have moved beyond law enforcement activities centered on countering terrorist plots—one end-product of the radicalization process—to producing programs aimed at countering radicalization itself.⁴ We should do the same. The sooner we do, the safer America becomes.

Our law enforcement officials have done an outstanding job of thwarting attacks. However, as the Fort Hood shooting points out, law enforcement cannot stop every act of terror. The increase of

¹ In 2009–10, some seventy American citizens were charged with or convicted of terrorism or related crimes (U.S. Congress, Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, hearing, *Nine Years After 9/11: Confronting the Threat to the Homeland*, September 22, 2010).

² Home Office statement regarding the BBC program *Muslim First, British Second*, February 16, 2009. Available at: http://news.bbc.co.uk/panorama/hi/front_page/newsid_7888000/7888793.stm (accessed on February 25, 2009).

³ David Stringer, “French MP, Eurozone Needs Closer Cooperation,” Associated Press, January 13, 2011. (<http://www.businessweek.com/ap/financialnews/D9KN10100.htm>)

⁴ Lorenzo Vidino, “Countering Radicalization in America; Lessons from Europe,” US Institute of Peace, November 2010. (http://www.usip.org/files/resources/SR262%20-%20Countering_Radicalization_in_America.pdf)

homegrown terrorist plots and the dangers associated with “lone wolves” require we move our focus from acts of terrorism to the radicalization that leads to terrorism.

To increase our chances of preventing homegrown terrorism, we should work to cut the supply of potential terrorists. Therefore, I respectfully request that your Administration develop a national strategy to counter radicalization.

As a former Mayor, I know that local officials understand their communities best. Local officials are always first on the scene when terrorism occurs and deal with the aftermath long after federal officials have left. Therefore, a sound strategy should account for the central role of state and local governments in implementing counter-radicalization programs within their communities. We must have full community support, including parents, teachers, law enforcement, business leaders, and local elected officials.

Without a counter-radicalization strategy, the government cannot seriously claim to be engaged in counterterrorism. In a national strategy, the role of the federal government should include collaboration, coordination, and oversight. A public health model that emphasizes prevention alongside our law enforcement efforts may be a useful approach. Regardless, we must provide the tools and resources that state and local governments need to tailor their efforts to their communities.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Sue Myrick". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Sue" and last name "Myrick" clearly distinguishable.

Sue Myrick
Member of Congress